

Real People Celebrate Holidays



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“Stop dieting. Start eating!”

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Are you a Real Person?

Then chances are pretty high you celebrate a holiday at some point during the year.

Chances are also high that the holidays you celebrate feature special food dishes, which probably **aren't** low-calorie, low-fat or even low-carb!

So, how do you enjoy the food traditions you treasure and still lose or maintain your weight?

Believe it or not, it **can** be done!

A recent study of American citizens proved that the average American only gains about a pound over the period between Thanksgiving Day and Christmas. That doesn't seem so bad, does it?

Well, think again. We never **lose** that pound, so that through the adult years, holiday pounds accumulate until we're 15 to 20 pounds overweight (if not more).

The news gets worse. For those subjects that were already overweight or obese, the average weight gain was **over 5 pounds** during the holiday season. It never came off. Now multiply THAT by 10 or 20 years, and you can understand why it's necessary to have a reasonable, do-able strategy for avoiding weight gain during any holiday season.

Now, a caveat is in order.

Just because treats are lower-carb doesn't mean they're **good** for you. So if you're on a special diet due to health issues, please keep eating the way your doctor has ordered.

Even if you aren't under special orders, don't go crazy with high-fat and high-calorie foods. Watch those trans fats and processed dinners. Consider cutting back on fast food as you enjoy more homemade goodies.

Remember what we said in 'Real People Don't Diet': healthy choices **always** work.

That said, let's learn how to enjoy holiday meals without feeling guilty.

Take a few minutes to strategize. Christmas 2006 was my first using our new Real People Don't Diet strategy.

Rather than just diving in, I took a few minutes before November approached to think about the food challenges I would face. I also reflected on how great it felt to finally be down two dress sizes, great I felt.

Then, I developed substitutions and strategies to overcome potential obstacles. I had a plan 'going in'.

For example, I was willing to gain a pound or two, because I knew that the simple elimination of holiday foods from my diet (turkey dinners, pies and cookies) as the holidays ended would result in a quick loss of the extra pound or two by the end of January (and my prediction was true, by the way).

Once the holidays were over, these foods would no longer be a temptation, and my natural eating habits would result in lower carb counts and weight loss.

So, there was no need to worry over or feel guilty about an extra pound or two—as long as I knew it would naturally come off.

I reviewed the parties and celebrations we were invited to. I planned ahead as to what I would make or bring, and what I would allow myself to eat and drink.

I also planned what I would bake or buy for my own home—candy, cookies, dinners.

That way, there were really no surprises. And I knew what I wanted to enjoy. Anticipation fulfilled is half the delight!

Purposeful eating results in a lot less ‘grazing’, a major contributor to unintended weight gain.

Prioritize the treats you want to enjoy. One of the strengths of the Real People Don’t Diet strategy is that it makes you prioritize food as you approach every meal. Which is more satisfying to you—drinking a Coke, or having fries? You can’t have both, but you can have one.

I used the same approach when it came to the holidays.

Highly aware of all the temptations that would appear, I decided that I needed to enjoy:

Two turkey dinners

Pumpkin pie

Christmas cookies

The candy and fudge weren’t as important to me. I don’t like eggnog to begin with, so that was a non-issue. Alcoholic drinks and rich desserts also weren’t important to me, so it was easy to make the decision to avoid those.

As the holiday season unfolded, I ate as much as I wanted at turkey dinners. I ate all the pumpkin pie I wanted. I ate Christmas cookies nearly every day.

And I did it all guilt-free, because I gave up all the non-priority food items that would have added carbs to my daily diet if I ate them just because they were 'there'.

Prioritizing foods is all about tricking your brain. This becomes even more important during the holidays, because our subconscious thinks "Hey, it's Christmas, and it only comes around once a year." So any sort of self-control you've built up is thrown out the window.

By training your brain to make trade-offs, and then fully enjoying the priorities you've assigned, you don't feel denied and you don't feel the need to throw self-control all the window. You get a full dose of the foods that are most important to you!

Look for ways to eat your priority foods in lower-carb style. There are lots of ways you can quickly cut carbs on your favorite holiday foods!

Compare stuffing to come up with the lowest-carb versions (believe it or not, depending on the mix or recipe, stuffing can vary by 10-20 grams of carbs per serving).

Serve vegetables steamed, or without heavy sauces. If vegetable casseroles are a priority food to you, then you will have to make trade-offs when it comes to other dishes (or eliminate breads and other starches from your meal) in order to enjoy them. Try to prepare casseroles using lower-carb versions of ingredients, if at all possible.

For gravy, make it homemade or use high-quality jar gravy (much fewer fillers). Add meat juices and water to dilute the high-carb fillers, keeping your gravy smooth and tasty, but maybe not quite as thick as usual.

Go for the delicious homemade cranberry relish instead of the canned, jellied cranberry sauce.

Skip the maple glaze on ham and use fresh pineapple slices and juice instead.

For deli platters, feature seedless rye, pumpernickel and soft wheat breads or rolls instead of white-flour selections.

Remember, you're not shooting for no-carb, just 'lower-carb'. Even if it's one or two carbs, as long as it's still **lower-carb**, you're losing weight.

Make one-for-one trade-offs. If you know you want to eat stuffing, and it runs around 30 grams of carbs per serving, then skip something else that runs around the same amount of carbs, such as a dinner roll.

Use simple math.

You want a slice of pumpkin pie after dinner. So you don't drink any eggnog.

Mom's lasagna is a must for Christmas Eve, so the garlic bread goes ignored.

The end result? You eat what you want, and you haven't gained an ounce.

Avoid high-carb beverages. This is an area where you can reap huge benefits. Completely avoid sodas or alcoholic beverages so you eat some of those holiday goodies. Alternatively, drink lower-carb versions.

If a non-alcoholic policy won't work for you during the holiday season, make a policy to drink half as much as you usually would. If you enjoy two beers, drink just one. Enjoy a single glass of merlot instead of two or three. Mathematically, you're actually **losing weight** with every sip!

Start your party off with a no-carb drink such as seltzer or water while you eat appetizers. Save the alcoholic beverages for dinner, or vice-versa. You'll enjoy your food more, and you'll naturally drink less alcohol, because you'll feel 'full'.

My family has adopted a 'BYOB' policy for every gathering throughout the year. That way, we don't have to be concerned as to which beverages are available to drink. Ensuring we have no-carb or low-carb drinks with us means we can look forward to all the yummy, higher-carb food items we're planning to enjoy! This policy makes it much easier to host a gathering as well, since you don't have to be concerned with what your guests' preferences or dietary requirements are.

Hot cocoa, that perennial cold-weather staple, is high in carbs. How to enjoy it? A bit less frequently and with only half a mug instead of a whole mug. We use Ovaltine instead of hot-chocolate mixes, because doesn't have hydrogenated ingredients and features less sugar. Top your half-mug with whipped cream instead of marshmallows. Sprinkle with powdered cocoa. If it's not sweet enough, stir in a candy cane instead of sugar. Mmmm....tastes great, less filling!

Watch those appetizers. This is a crucial area for holiday weight gain. Just about any type of gathering will feature appetizers. In fact, some gatherings are all **about** the appetizers!

Glance over all your options, and then begin your prioritizing and trade-off strategies.

A typical plan:

Several slices of cheese, only two or three wheat crackers

No chips and dip

Unlimited fruit chunks

Unlimited veggies

Unlimited chicken wings

Unlimited meatballs

Shrimp

A small scoop of the taco dip and a couple tortilla chips

Skip the weird-smelling pastry puffs

Just one stuffed mushroom

Lots of black olives

That's a ton of food, but very few carbs. Feel like seconds? Load up on more meatballs, chicken wings, fruit chunks and cheese!

You'll take the edge off your hunger, still lose weight, and keep your appetite for dinner! No more being 'stuffed' before you even sit down.

Time for dessert. Ah...of course you're prioritized some dessert! Now's the time to enjoy it.

Watch for accompanying carbs by eliminating after-dinner drinks or sugar in your coffee. Remember, dropping the sugar in your coffee is allowing you to have that slice of pumpkin pie—and still lose weight! It's not denial, it's simply a question of what you want **more**.

You can get into trouble with cookies and candy, since they come in smaller portions. Take what you want and then walk away. Don't stand in front of the tray or bowl, and don't come back for seconds.

What serving size would you normally take? Five cookies, a piece of fudge and a couple chocolates? Then take just two cookies and the chocolates. Skip the fudge. Remember, even one reduction counts.

Load up on no-carb garnishes like whipped cream or sprinkled cocoa. Using garnishes like these tricks your brain into thinking you have a 'huge' portion, when in reality, you just have a small piece of pie buried under a mound of whipped cream! Yum, yum—and you're still losing weight.

Portion size is crucial. You already know this. But you don't practice it.

Why not?

Because to you, 'reducing portion size' means having that little ¼ cup serving the diet book recommends, or the pricey restaurant in the city serves.

Nope.

When you're a Real Person, reducing portions simply means eating just a little bit less than you normally would. Or, it means stopping when you're full, versus eating everything on your plate.

Remember, you have to trick your brain. So the portion size you choose must still appear satisfying to you.

A great strategy is to divide your plate into sections. Try to keep your carb-heavy foods to ¼ of your plate or less.

I love pie, and my Gram makes the **best** pies in the entire world (please don't send me hate mail and claim that you or your grandma make the best pies—I will simply ignore you).

So now, rather than have her give me one slice each of her fabulous apple and chocolate cream pie, I ask for a half-slice of each. I put them on the same plate at the same time. I add extra whipped cream to stack plate high. I enjoy every bite and don't feel the least bit deprived!

Doing this means I actually eat **half as much pie** as I normally would and results in a 50% net reduction in carbs. In other words, I **lose weight** as I eat that pie!

How can you beat that?

Make sure your portions are satisfying, but smaller than normal, and you can't go wrong. Your portion size is strictly up to you.

Cookies and candy. This gets a bit tricky. How can you avoid these goodies when the holidays roll around?

You can't. Really. It's just about impossible—especially if you have kids!

So, again, the strategy is to find a way to tally fewer carbs at the end of the day, regardless of how many cookies and pieces of candy you actually eat.

I begin by controlling portion size. One fewer cookie than normal. One miniature candy bar instead of three.

I also decide to bake cookies that are lower-carb than others. Check your recipes and ingredients—they should give carb information. If the cookies I bake this year are lower-carb than last year, then I can eat just as many cookies as last year and **still lose weight!**

(Isn't this great?)

Another strategy is to make or bake fewer items than you normally would. Do you usually bake eight different types of Christmas cookies? Then choose your favorite four varieties this year instead and stick to those. Eat as many as you like. You're still eating less than last year!

Six different appetizers? Cut down to four.

Two varieties of fudge? Choose one. Better yet, don't do fudge this year. Try chocolate-covered nuts instead.

Switch from milk chocolate to dark chocolate.

Do you make a couple different types of high-sugar candy? Replace those with cookies, if possible.

Those high-carb gifts...what to do? Shhh....don't tell anyone....RE-GIFT! As neighbors and friends drop off those yummy canisters of popcorn and cookies, I keep half for us and re-gift the other half. I make up nice bags of goodies for the postman, newspaper carrier and refuse specialists.

I use part of our food gifts for the dessert table at family gatherings instead of baking my own cookies or candies. I save time and money, and offload the extra treats. No one knows the difference!

In appreciation of my neighbors' and friends' thoughtfulness, I take the portions reserved for our family and savor them, giving thanks for the generosity and goodness behind each and every bite. I also do it guilt-free, because I've cut my usual carbs—in half!

Preparing for parties. If you know you'll be attending a dinner or party later in the day, have a no-carb breakfast or lunch in order to 'bank' carbs for later.

For breakfast, you could enjoy eggs with fruit and ice water and/or coffee. Add sausage or bacon if you wish.

For lunch, eat a broth-based soup or meat and cheese selection. Broil up a burger and enjoy with a few crunch baby carrots or lower-carb kettle chips.

When the party rolls around, you can have a few treats here and there and enjoy a cocktail or two. You've got plenty of carbs to spare!

CONCLUSION

These are just some of the strategies you can use for just about any type of holiday you find yourself celebrating.

Remember to prioritize the foods and traditions that are important to you. Make them as low-carb as you can, but don't sacrifice one bit of the pleasure and satisfaction you derive from them. Otherwise, it will feel like denial...and that's dieting...and it won't work!

For the other foods and traditions that aren't as high on your list, consider reducing or eliminating them altogether.

Focus on what really matters and you'll find the focus is taken off food.

But when it **is** appropriate to focus on food, you'll be able to celebrate as much as you like, guilt-free, because at the end of the day...**you're still taking in fewer carbs!**

And if you're taking in fewer carbs than you normally would, you're losing weight!

Now, go enjoy the holidays!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cate Brizzell and her husband Chris developed the “Real People Don’t Diet” weight-loss strategy in June of 2006. By the time her e-book of the same name was published in January of 2007 the couple had lost nearly 60 pounds combined.



A freelance author and stay-at-home mom, Cate manages website design and content for local corporate clients. She founded and maintains several websites of her own, including www.home-budget-help.com and www.moms-make-money-online.com, as well as www.RealPeopleDontDiet.com.

Cate lives with her husband and three children in upstate New York where she enjoys homeschooling, Jane Austen novels, scrapbooking, golf and traveling to tropical destinations whenever possible!